

# HIST 711 Research Seminar (2006)

Thompson 108  
M 7:20-10:00  
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and by appointment

## SCHEDULE

Monday,  
August 28

—

Housekeeping & Introductions

Monday,  
September 4

—

NO CLASS-LABOR DAY  
**BLOG URL DUE**

Monday,  
September 11

—

Reading:  
Josephine Tey, *Daughter of Time*  
Michael Wayne, *Death of an Overseer*  
Writing:  
Problem #1: The Census and Data Linkage (Reader)  
**BLOG POST #1 DUE—PROBLEM #1**  
**LAST DAY TO ADD CLASSES**

Monday,  
September 18

—

Reading:  
Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg*  
Will: Robert Christian (Download)  
Will: Robert Christian (Download)  
Probate: Probate of Samuel Hayes (Download)  
Probate: Louisa Courselle (Download)  
Inquest: Mamie Grover (Download)  
Web Visit:  
Visible Proofs  
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/visibleproofs/index.html>  
Cyndi's List  
<http://www.cyndislist.com/wills.htm#General>  
Writing:  
Problem #2: Wills, Probates & Coroner's Inquests (Reader)  
**BLOG POST #2 DUE—PROBLEM #2**

Monday, September 25	—	Reading: Michael Grossberg, <i>Governing the Hearth</i> Civil Suit: <i>Bordeaux v. Bordeaux</i> (Microfiche) Writing: Problem #3: Civil Suits (Reader) <b>BLOG POST #3 DUE—RESEARCH STATEMENT</b>
Friday, September 29	—	<b>LAST DAY TO DROP CLASSES</b>
Saturday September 30– Wednesday, October 27, 2006	—	<b>ELECTIVE WITHDRAWAL PERIOD</b> (Full-Semester Course)
Monday, October 2	—	Reading: Michael Grossberg, <i>Governing the Hearth</i> Civil Suit: <i>Bordeaux v. Bordeaux</i> (Microfiche) Writing: Problem #4: Civil Suits (Reader) <b>BLOG POST #4 DUE— PROBLEM #3</b>
Monday, October 9	—	<b>NO CLASS (COLUMBUS DAY)</b>
Tuesday, October 10	—	Reading: Stephen Lubet, <i>Murder in Tombstone</i> Patricia Cline Cohen, <i>The Murder of Helen Jewett</i> Criminal Suit: <i>State v. Rehberg</i> (Download) Writing: Problem #4: Criminal Suits (Reader) <b>BLOG POST #5 DUE—PROBLEM #4</b> <b>BLOG POST #6 DUE—ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>
Monday, October 16	—	Reading: Joe Nickell, <i>Camera Clues</i> Painting: <i>The Quilting Frolic</i> (Reader) Writing: Problem #5: Images (Reader) <b>BLOG POST #7 DUE—PROBLEM #5</b>
Monday, October 23	—	Reading: Jeremy Black, <i>Maps and History</i> Map: Barrow's Plantation (Reader) Writing: Problem #6: Maps (Reader) <b>BLOG POST #8 DUE—PROBLEM #6</b>

Monday, October 30	—	Reading: Simon Schama, <i>Dead Certainties</i> Writing: Problem #7: Writing History (Reader) <b>BLOG POST #9 DUE—PROBLEM #7</b>
Monday, November 6	—	<b>NO CLASS (Research &amp; Writing)</b> <b>BLOG POST #10 DUE—RESEARCH UPDATE</b>
Monday, November 13	—	<b>NO CLASS (Research &amp; Writing)</b> <b>BLOG POST #11 DUE—RESEARCH UPDATE</b>
Monday, November 20	—	<b>FIRST DRAFT DUE (IN CLASS)</b>
Monday, November 27	—	<b>INDIVIDUAL CONFERENCES (TBA)</b>
Tuesday, November 28	—	<b>INDIVIDUAL CONFERENCES (TBA)</b>
Monday, December 4	—	<b>NO CLASS (Revision)</b> <b>BLOG POST #12 DUE—REVISION UPDATE</b>
Monday, December 11	—	<b>FINAL DRAFT DUE (IN CLASS)</b> <b>SELF-EVALUATION DUE</b>

## COURSE

This course is designed as a “nuts and bolts” course in the sources and methodology of social history appropriate to the nineteenth century and early twentieth century US. Instead of concentrating on a topic, the course looks at different primary sources and examines their problems and prospects for research. In addition to the standard textual sources in US history—newspapers, diaries, letter collections, and so forth—there other, less commonly used but equally rich sources for historical research and analysis: census abstracts and manuscripts, property conveyances, wills and probates, civil and criminal trials (appellate and district), maps, images, and artifacts. These are the focus of the course. How have historians used these materials? Where do historians find them? What can be gleaned from such documents? And how do researchers cope with problems presented by these materials?

## BOOKS

The following books are required for the course. They are available in the Campus Bookstore or from other vendors far and wide. These texts, essentially, demonstrate the use the various documents that we will be looking at in class. Read them quickly as examples of what can be done.

Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg*  
 Patricia Cline Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett*  
 Michael Grossberg, *Governing the Hearth*  
 Joe Nickell, *Camera Clues*

Simon Schama, *Dead Certainties*  
Jeremy Black, *Maps and History*  
Josephine Tey, *Daughter of Time*  
Michael Wayne, *Death of an Overseer: Reopening a Murder on the Plantation South*  
Steven Lubet, *Murder in Tombstone: The Forgotten Trial of Wyatt Earp*

## TYPEPAD

You are required to obtain a Plus-level subscription to Typepad, a blog. TypePad is available at: <<http://www.typepad.com>>. All of your writing assignments will be posted to your Typepad blog. The cost is \$8.95 per month or roughly \$27.00 for the semester (the cost of a modest textbook). The best thing to do is sign up for a free trial; this will furnish you with a month's free service. At the end of the semester, you can cancel your subscription. Or, you may discover that you like blogging so much that you retain your subscription. Alternatively, you may know someone who can mount a blogging application (WordPress, for example) at your ISP. That's fine. We will not use Blogger (or any other free service, for that matter) because of the ads, server unreliability, and spam problems.

A word about design. Good design helps your blog visitors find what they are looking for and read it once found. Certain design elements contribute to readability and legibility. For your TypePad blog, you can choose any design in Classic, Bold Colors, Cool Colors, Pale Palettes categories **except** Folio, Beckett, Sunburned, and Porpoise. These are just plain difficult to read, and I do not want to go blind. You should **not** choose anything from the Special Interest group. When you choose a layout, choose a two or three column layout. **Avoid** the mixed media layout; they are not appropriate for history.

## POLICIES

All of what follows is probably familiar to you, but I am explaining and stating these policies now, in the clearest possible terms, so there can be no dispute over what I expect. If you have questions about my expectations, please raise them. But whenever you ask me to modify my expectations because you failed to plan and use your time efficiently, you put me as well as the rest of the class in the ethically difficult position of applying different standards to different people.

### *Attendance*

Participants in a graduate seminar are expected to attend class unless some dire emergency arises—something on the order of a cosmic intervention. Because the class depends on class discussion of materials that are relatively unfamiliar to many, it is even more important that students come to class prepared to enter into lively debate. A word to the wise, in short, should be sufficient.

### *Students with Disabilities*

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at (703) 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

### *Email*

Please check your GMU mailbox periodically or arrange for your GMU mailbox material to be forwarded to your preferred email address. In addition, be sure that your mailbox has not exceeded its capacity so that your mail bounces back to me. If I send out announcements, I use the GMU mailing class mailing lists per university regulations. If you need to email me, please put HIST 711 in the subject line and sign your full name. This will help my spam detector route you to the proper folder, guarantee that I read your email, and ensure that I know who you are.

### *A Note on Computer Use*

Computers are a great boon to the graduate student. But, as with any technology, you must take steps to minimize the problems that computers inevitably cause. Do not expect to get through the semester without having at least one computer crisis. Prepare for this well in advance. Back up your work constantly and have alternative plans for obtaining computer use, if your primary options fail you. I will never accept computer problems as excuses for missed assignments. You must also keep backup copies of submitted assignments—either in electronic form or hard copy.

Similarly, computers and email permit around-the-clock communication. If you have questions or need to apprise me of an emergency situation, contact me via email.

[ppetrik@gmu.edu](mailto:ppetrik@gmu.edu)

Should you need to discuss an issue with the instructor, contact me via email or by phone to make an appointment. Do not, however, expect an immediate response. Many of your questions can be answered by consulting the web site at:

<http://www.archiva.net>

Your best chance of reaching me immediately by email is during my office hours. Even then I cannot make a guarantee because I may well be with another student.

### *Grades*

Grades, including +s and -s, will be assigned in the following manner. REMEMBER THEY REPRESENT AN EVALUATION, NOT A REWARD. To rephrase Smith-Barney (now Salomon Smith Barney), the investment folk, we do grades the old-fashioned way—earn them.

A—Outstanding work, complete mastery of the material presented, combined with some originality.

B—A solid command of the material with some gaps or mistakes in a basically sound essay or discussion.

C—Some knowledge of the material; mistakes and confusion are acceptable if mixed with some understanding. Not a reward for attendance or effort.

D—An incomplete and minimal knowledge of the material, major confusions and errors.

F—A failure to present the material in a reasonably accurate and comprehensible manner.

I—There are no “incompletes” given in this course except in cases of bona fide and documented instances in accordance with the regulations of the university.

P—For a “pass” a “C” average is required.

If you receive a grade or criticism that seems unfair or if you desire further explanation, please feel free to discuss the matter with me by making an appointment. My policy is not to discuss grades via email.

## **REQUIREMENTS**

The requirements for the course are as follows: (1) Seminar Participation (15%); 2) Blog comments (15%); (3) Blog posts (30%); and (4) Final Essay (40%); (5) a self-evaluation (one-page, typed, single-spaced) assessing your performance in the course (not graded but required).

### *Blog Posts & Blog Comments*

Each week you are expected to make a three-paragraph (or so) entry in your blog of the reading for that week and one short response to another’s post. These must be posted on your blog the *day before class*. These may take many different forms, but they should all address the problem

or fulfill the assignment. Because this is a research seminar, a post should include a “spin off” into your own thinking about the possibilities of a document. These will, to be frank, drive you nuts, but they will hone your writing skills and prove invaluable when the time comes for seminar discussion and framing your research paper.

### *Seminar Participation*

Seminar participation means lively and engaged discussion of the readings. You cannot hope to derive the most from the course if you sit on the sidelines and listen to the play-by-play.

### *Research Paper*

The overarching goal for the major project is the creation of a reasonably sophisticated historical argument (25–30 pages excluding bibliography and notes) based on research in both primary and secondary sources. The essay should also be situated in the pertinent historical debate. In addition, the essay should exhibit clear and error-free prose and include a bibliography and notes (footnotes or endnotes) following the Turabian or the Chicago style. Ideally, the paper should make use of the sort of documents that we have encountered in the course, but I’m aware that some of you have topics already in mind that use different source materials and may focus on debates in cultural or intellectual history.

A first draft is not the first version of the essay but the best of successive versions of the essay that you can manage working alone or with the help of another reader. This means that by the first draft, the essay should have gone through at least two rounds of editing or revision. It should be in the best form possible with respect to organization, argument, grammar and mechanics, inclusion of quotations, and format. The first draft should also include a title, page numbers, and footnotes. (Use placeholders for the bibliography, illustration, charts, graphs, and tables.) It is my custom to line-edit the first draft. We then meet in individual conferences to go over the essay and strategize about what needs to be done.

The final draft is, again, the product of multiple revisions. The last revisions also clean up all the missteps in mechanics and grammar and strengthens the argument, taking into account both the instructor’s comments and the conference discussion. The final draft incorporates the bibliography, illustrations, charts, and graphs in their final format.

It’s extremely important to get an early start on your research paper. Let me say that again: start early. A good research paper is the result of long hours and hard work. You can expect to spend at least eight hours each week on your work and more in the research phase. This is not said to spook you but to furnish a clear-sighted estimate of what is necessary.

## **SELF-EVALUATION GUIDELINES**

Oftentimes, a letter grade does not reflect the effort that students put into a course, the amount a student has learned, or the skills that a student has acquired. A self-evaluation is one way of remedying this deficiency by illustrating and documenting your participation in the course from your perspective. This is the time to argue for yourself and put your best foot forward. In fact, it is in your interest to do the best job that you can on this assignment. The self-evaluation should be a one-page, typed single-spaced paper in which you address the following topics:

- I. Evaluation of your participation in the class
  - A. attendance
  - B. time devoted to the materials
    1. assigned reading
    2. blog
    3. seminar leadership
    4. essays
  - C. class participation

1. seminar discussion

D. the ways in which you think you improved or not

E. the problems you encountered in your effort to complete the class assignments to your satisfaction.

F. what you would have done differently

G. some of the skills or knowledge that you acquired

II. A general assessment of how you will apply what you have gained (or not) from the class in the future